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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet provides supervisors with brief pointers in dealing with and aiding young workers. (For related documents, see AC 014 426, 428-429.) (KM)

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VA PAMPHLET 05-41

Common Sense About Supervising Young Workers

Pointers on Getting Them Off to a Good Start

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Each year, particularly during the summer months, the Veterans Administration hires thousands of high school and college youths, as well as dropouts, for temporary work. These youths, as well as others, may later enter the Government service and eventually become career employees.

They present to management and supervisors a challenge to adapt their supervision to the characteristics and behavior of youth in order to develop the work habits and attitudes that a good worker needs.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to discuss certain general principles, attitudes and practices which may help you to develop in youthful workers you supervise the work habits and attitudes which may determine the whole future course of their productive life and help them to achieve the adult status they are looking for.

This pamphlet is adapted from Bulletin 174, "The Youth You Supervise," U.S. Department of Labor.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the youngsters you will supervise are entering a new, strange world as they take on their first jobs. They are not "workers" until they have had a chance to learn how. YOU, Mr. Supervisor, may well be the key to whether or not the new recruit develops good work habits and constructive attitudes.

Youth's sharp eyes, quick fingers, energy, and readiness to learn are assets. Yet young workers account for much of the turnover in unskilled entry jobs. If they leave before they can be moved on to more skilled jobs, it costs time, money, and wasted effort.

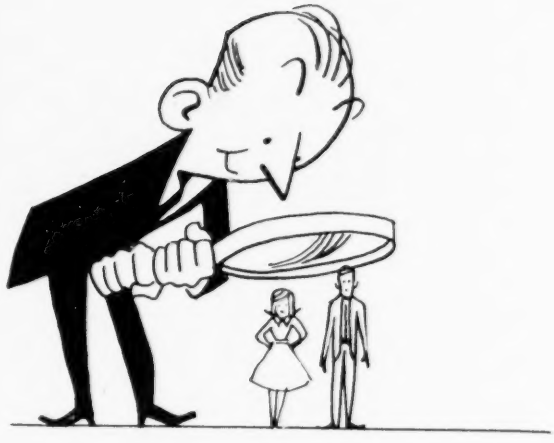
Whether you have one or many young people; whether they work full- or part-time, it's important to you and to the VA that they get started right—and important for them and for the country.

I've been telling Joe about neatness, but he doesn't seem to get the idea.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUNG PEOPLE?

As supervisor, you can be a constructive counselor to youth and your influence will go beyond the immediate job. Helping young people find satisfaction in work has many rewards.

Naturally, you want to make efficient workers out of your young workers. Success will depend on your understanding of what youth are like and your skill in applying general principles of good supervision, good supervision to youth on the job.



LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THESE YOUNG WORKERS

Here are some pointers to keep in mind . . .

1 WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?

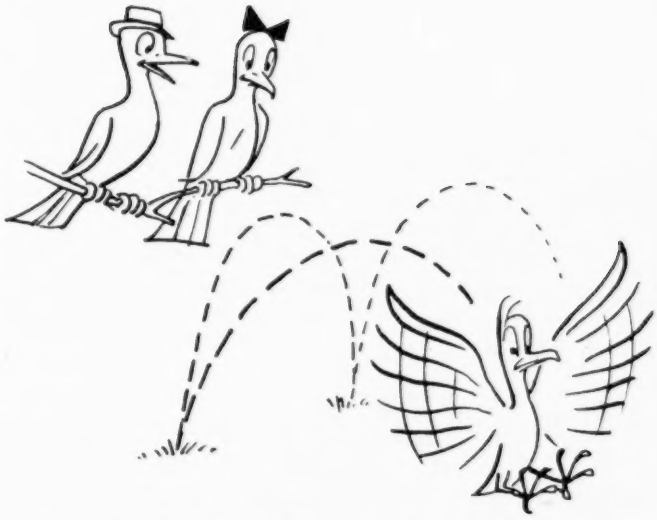
Each one is different. Each is changing at his own rate and in his own way from child to adult. This time of rapid change begins at about 12 to 14 years of age and continues to 21 or 22. The period of great stress comes between 14 and 18.

You can almost see them grow.

- What does this growth mean to them?
- How do their attitudes and interests change?
- How are they struggling to work out an adult self—to decide the kinds of persons they want to be?

They are anxious to "belong" in the adult world, and yet they are slow sometimes to give up their childish ways. It's important to them to be independent—to throw off adult dominations of childhood.

Many of them still have to learn that grownups, too, are subject to authority. They're not full-fledged adults yet but they're trying their wings.

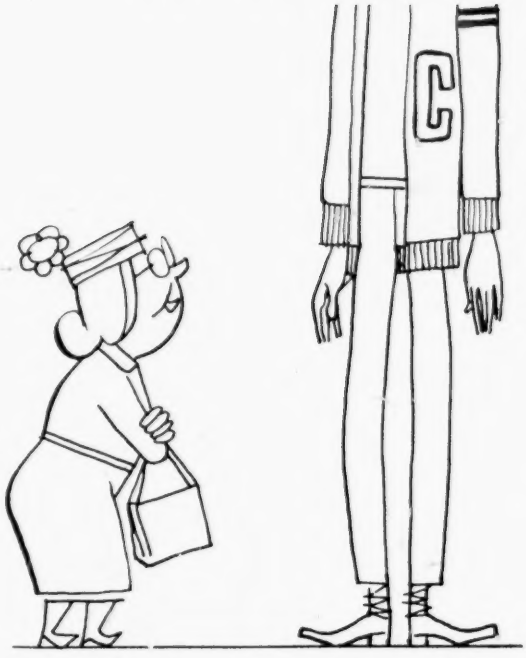


He's not ready to fly on his own yet but he's getting there.

2 LET'S LOOK AT HOW THEY GROW

It takes about 8 years for a child to become an adult. During this period bones and muscles may grow rapidly or gradually. The circulatory system must expand and glands develop to perform their function for the body. Sometimes these changes are so gradual and so well coordinated that one scarcely notices them. Sometimes, though, they are so fast and so uneven that you may be dismayed.

Boys gain 50 percent in muscle volume during adolescence. Some muscles may grow faster than others. This may make young people awkward and unpredictable—even to themselves. Long bones may grow faster than muscles, and the tall boy may not be as strong as he looks.



You've grown since I last saw you, haven't you?

The heart doubles in size during this period, but the tall boy's heart may not have started its spurt of growth. If a small heart has to pump blood through a grownup body, the youth tires quickly. This is NOT LAZINESS.

Glands may develop unequally too. This often makes youth unpredictable emotionally. It DOESN'T mean that they are basically undependable.

Usually, young people at this age are healthy—they have few illnesses. But growing bodies need plenty of sleep and rest.

Their reaction time and their capacity for speed and coordination in small movements are fully developed, but they need TRAINING.

HOW THEY THINK AND LEARN

The typical adolescent of 16 or 17 has just about attained his adult ability to learn. He has also reached the age when he wants to reason things out—to understand the principle behind the action. HE DOES NOT ARGUE JUST TO SHOW OFF.

You'll probably find a sharpness of mind if you look for it. Bright young people are likely to resent being talked down to. However, though they may be intelligent, they can acquire judgment only through experience. Their judgment grows as they meet and solve problems.

These youths learn from observing you and their fellow workers as well as from what you deliberately try to teach them.

THEY ARE ESPECIALLY PRONE TO IMITATE GROWNUPS THEY ADMIRE.

4 PUT HIM AT EASE

Everyone learns faster when he feels at ease. Youth may be so absorbed by concern about the new situation they find themselves in that at first their minds are not free to learn.

Success in the first steps is important to learning. If young workers are confronted with failure as they begin a new activity, they may be afraid to try again. You can help them use their mistakes to increase their learning.

Youth may be doing a great deal of intellectual and emotional exploring. This is part of what adults call "daydreaming." They look for answers to big questions—are searching for ideals, for values, for understanding of life. Their idealism makes them responsive to appeals for teamwork, loyalty, and high standards.

5 HOW THEY FEEL

Youth are insecure in this growing-up stage. They hate to be laughed at. They don't want to ask questions that may sound silly. Adolescents may feel grown up and confident one day and like children the next. They grow out of this!

When they are in a self-confident phase, they may act intolerant of adults whom they think make mountains out of molehills. Everything is simple to them when they are in a conquering mood.

They are often very critical of themselves and sensitive to blame. On the other hand, they are reluctant to admit errors to others and are easily discouraged if ridiculed or criticized too harshly.

They may be as critical of others as they are of themselves. They expect a lot from adults around them and feel very let down when grownups fail them.

Youth have a deep need to be accepted as persons in their own right. When they are treated as adults, they usually respond with adult behavior. They value the respect of adults around them, even though sometimes they don't seem to know how to gain it.

IF THEY FEEL YOUR INTEREST IN THEM AND YOUR DESIRE TO HELP THEM MAKE GOOD, THEY'LL PROBABLY ACCEPT YOU AS A FRIEND AND ADVISER.

Why do you say I went up too fast?

WHAT THEY WANT

YOUTH ARE A BUNDLE OF CONTRADICTIONS. They want to be treated as individuals, yet want to be part of their "crowd." They're strongly group-minded and want to be part of a team.

They want to do things in the accepted grownup way. This makes them try to appear sophisticated. To hide insecurity they may affect a bold manner, or slang, or even profanity.

Young people often want different things from a job than adults do. Human relationships are important to them. They usually want most of all to like the people they work with and to be liked by them. They want the boss to like them too. They'll try harder and do better if they feel they're recognized and liked.

Their interest in the opposite sex is not suspended during working hours. Girls and boys will play up to boys and girls though it may look silly to adults. They have to learn that social interests mustn't interfere with their jobs.

Young people want to be successful. But those who are both in school and at work have school success on their minds as well as success on the job. Besides wanting good grades, they are also concerned about success in other activities—athletics, dramatics, school social life.

Their sense of values may be strained when the job conflicts with the biggest football game of the season. They may need your help in getting the right perspective.

BUT THEY WANT JOB SUCCESS, TOO. They may expect too much too fast. They may not realize their own limitations or the limitation of the job. You may be able to help them set goals in keeping with their abilities and show them how to reach them.

7 HOW TO SPEED THEIR PROGRESS

You do for youth all the things you do for other new workers, and always you remember they are young and developing in body and mind. Because they are in that in-between stage when they are not quite adult, some general principles of supervision take on special importance in dealing with youth. Or we slant them differently when we're supervising youth.

The new worker has no office know-how, has never experienced the routine things you're likely to take for granted in a work situation. You can expect him to react differently from adults. Remember what a change it was for you to go from classroom to workroom?

I think the young fellow who did this sign doesn't know how things work around here.

8 DEVELOP GOOD WORK ATTITUDES

You want your workers to be cooperative, willing to pitch in when emergencies arise, to have pride in the organization and to feel they have a stake in it. These cooperative attitudes are a byproduct of all the supervisor's dealings with his employees from the time they enter on duty until they leave. You have a great opportunity to develop good attitudes in your young workers.

When you stress the "we" and not the "I," it makes them feel they belong. Learning about the organization, the benefit programs, and top management personnel and policies will boost their morale. You can stimulate job interest by helping them see why their work is essential and how it fits into the total pattern. It helps if you tell them ahead of time about changes that will affect them.

You can develop their initiative by encouraging them to figure out ways of cutting out waste or of making their work easier or better.

Praise your young workers, too, when their work merits it. It will make them feel you're their friend, and they'll do more out of loyalty than out of fear.

The language and behavior of the other workers will influence their behavior, too. Encourage the kind of atmosphere you'd consider suitable for your own children.

Bad attitudes toward work or fellow workers are cited as reasons for job failure more frequently than inability to do the work. If young people act defiant or resentful, it may be merely an experiment in independence, or maybe they're identifying you with their parents who refuse to let them grow up. If you use an honest approach, you'll encourage cooperative attitudes.

ATTITUDES ARE CAUGHT, NOT TAUGHT.

9 START THEM RIGHT

The VA has an orientation program for all new employees, because it is necessary to help them adjust to their new jobs. But it takes more time and attention to special details to get young workers off to a good start. This is worth doing because they have many useful years ahead of them if they get started right.

Remember that inside they're probably scared—it's up to you to relieve the tension. A friendly word can be a lifeline. Once they have some confidence, they'll be able to learn faster.

- Take time to show them where all the facilities are—washroom, lunchroom, health unit, etc.

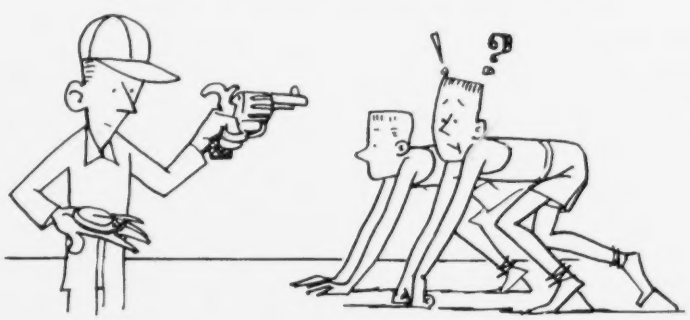
- Explain how and when they'll be paid and what deductions will be made.

- Explain unit rules and regulations before they inadvertently offend.

- Put them under the wing of a friendly worker with more experience, to help them feel at home and find their way around. Other workers can help by accepting the young ones in their give and take on the job—not bullying or playing practical jokes.

- Talk to them about the end product or what the VA does for veterans. They want to be part of something bigger than they are.

A GOOD START IS HALF THE BATTLE.



10 SHOW THEM HOW

Training workers in job skills is a big part of your supervisory job. It's always a good idea to plan and organize jobs in short units for beginners. BUT FOR YOUNG WORKERS THIS IS ESSENTIAL.

Breaking up their jobs into small units eases them into a full workday gradually. They aren't used to sticking at one thing for 8 hours each day. School and home tasks have usually been short ones.

Don't just tell young workers what to do—show them how to do it. Take it step by step. Then let them do it a step at a time. Take it slower and go into more detail than with adult workers because you know they are green.

Talk to them in words they'll understand, remembering that technical terms and lingo will be confusing unless they are explained. Make it easy for them to ask questions. When they know why things are done your way, they catch on faster. They also feel that you respect their intelligence and they don't have to show off to impress you.

Well, "duplicate" means like "hit me again, dad."

Most beginners worry more about speed than quality. They need to know what you consider of first importance—speed or quality. They may not realize that keeping a steady pace and doing the job right makes a difference to their fellow workers. Young people don't mind your being firm as long as you're fair and square.

Encourage them to think about what they are doing. If they routinely perform an operation, they may routinely repeat the same error over and over until you discover it.

IT'S AS IMPORTANT FOR YOUTH TO LEARN GOOD WORK HABITS AS TO MASTER SKILLS.

I'll admit you type fast, but accuracy is also very important.

11 KEEP THEM ON THE JOB

Reducing absenteeism by keeping workers accident-free and healthy concerns all of us, but most of all it concerns you as a supervisor. Absent workers don't produce.

Youth need more guidance in safety measures than older employees. They are curious—like to experiment—take more chances.

Give them clear orders about safe areas and practices. Point out that doing things the right way means doing them the safe way. Help them see the reasons for safety regulations and cleanup rules. Show them how to lift and carry. Demonstrate safe and proper use of equipment. You must be prepared to teach them safe practices over and over again.

Above all watch your cigarettes, we don't want any fires around here.

Breaks in routine or changes in operation will help their growing bodies. If work is monotonous or if it involves a steady strain, arrange for rest periods. Young workers may not look ahead to consider that they've got to last out the working day. For example, girls may not realize that they can do the job better if they wear low heels for standing.

If they're late often, or just away, you may want to try to find out why. Helping them learn to take care of their health and to feel responsible for being on the job is better than firing them. They'll probably accept guidance from you that they'd reject from their parents, once they see how it's related to job success. If you have to separate a young worker, tell him why—it may help him on his next job.

I think we should have him carry that mailbag on the other shoulder for a while.

12 HELP THEM GET AHEAD

As a supervisor you are continually checking your employees' progress and giving them credit for good work done. You also have to look ahead and plan for future personnel needs. In order to match people and jobs, you have to be able to size up people's abilities and analyze the requirements of various jobs.

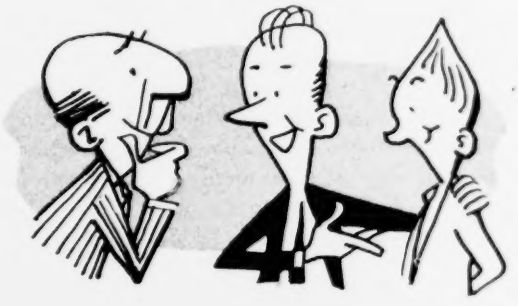
DON'T OVERLOOK YOUR YOUNG WORKERS WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS FOR THEM.

Youth may be misled by an abundance of job openings into thinking they can advance themselves by hopping from one job to another. Explain to them how they'll be given more responsibility once they've got their bearings.

Encourage the ambitious ones and show them how they can get ahead. Watch for developing abilities. If promotion depends on more education or training, tell them where and how they can get it.

If there are better jobs that they could be considered for in another division, don't hold them back. Don't keep a young worker on a beginner's job just because he does it well, or because it's a nuisance to train him on the next one.

IT'S GOOD SUPERVISION TO SEE THAT AMBITIOUS YOUNG WORKERS GET A CHANCE TO USE THEIR HIGHEST CAPACITIES.



I'm sure Jack can do the job—he's got a mighty sharp head on him.

TO SUM IT ALL UP

ERIC Clearinghouse
JUL 11 1973
on Adult Education

1. UNDERSTAND YOUR YOUNG WORKERS

- They are growing up physically and mentally.
- They have learning ability but lack judgment.
- They are striving for independence but feel insecure.
- They want to conform yet value their individuality.

2. TEACH THEM

- Make your orders clear and concise.
- Start them on jobs they can do quickly and well.
- Teach them safe practices.
- Answer their questions and explain their mistakes.

3. ENCOURAGE THEM

- Make them welcome.
- Praise them when they deserve it.
- Help them stand on their own feet.
- Show them your enthusiasm.

4. RESPECT THEM

- Listen to their ideas.
- Give them responsibility when they can take it.
- Help them find opportunities for training and education.
- Promote them when you can.